

Light



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...on Bible Prophecy

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Cover picture by Steve Wall

Note: All Bible quotations are taken from the New King James
version except where indicated in the text.

What is Prophecy?

PROPHECY IS THE 'prediction of future events' [Oxford English Reference Dictionary 2nd Edition]. Many people make predictions concerning possible incidents affecting themselves and others, but they would hardly claim to be prophets! Newspapers and magazines give indications as to the likely effect that the position of the stars might have upon your happiness, wealth and peace of mind but they would hardly claim that their predictions are certain to come true.

Bible prophecy is entirely different, in that it claims to be given by prophets whose predictions have come from God, so that the details are definite and the outcome certain. The Apostle Peter wrote about the origin and importance of Bible prophecy in these words: *'We also have the prophetic word made more sure, which you do well to heed as to a light that shines in a dark place...for prophecy never came by the will of man, but holy men of God spoke, as they were moved by the Holy Spirit'* [2 Peter 1.19-21].

The reason we should study Bible prophecies is that ultimately they will affect everyone. Many Bible prophecies have already been fulfilled and this gives us confidence that predictions relating to the future will also be fulfilled. The following articles invite you to consider some of these prophecies, showing how they relate to our own times and the ultimate accomplishment of God's plan for the world.

You are invited to consider carefully the examples of prophecy put forward in these articles, look up the Bible references and analyse the historical facts put forward. By so doing we hope that you will gain a strong conviction that God controls the affairs of all the nations and will shortly bring about the fulfilment of His plan.

The Prophets in Their Historical Setting

Date	Prophets	Kings and Rulers		Empires
BC		Israel	Judah	
900	Elijah Elisha	Ahab Jehoshaphat Ahaziah Joram Jehu Jehoahaz Jehoash	Jehoram Ahaziah Q.Athaliah Joash Amaziah	ASSYRIA Shalmaneser III
800	Joel Jonah Amos Hosea Micah Isaiah	Jeroboam II Zechariah Menahem Pekahiah Pekah Hoshea Hezekiah	Uzziah Jotham Ahaz	Tiglath-Pileser III Shalmaneser V Sargon Sennacherib
700	Nahum Zephaniah Jeremiah Habakkuk		Manasseh Amon Josiah Jehoiakim Zedekiah	BABYLON
600	Obadiah Daniel Ezekiel Haggai		Zerubbabel	Nebuchadnezzar Nabonidus Belshazzar PERSIA Cyrus Darius
500	Zechariah Malachi		Ezra Nehemiah	Ahasuerus Artaxerxes I



God's Plan in Prophecy

HOW POWERLESS WE are when it comes to foretelling the future with any degree of certainty! Have you ever arranged to meet a friend at a particular place and then after waiting an hour, found he has been prevented from coming? Have you ever decided to go out somewhere and when the time has come, found you are not well enough? Have you ever wondered how you are going to live when you are too old and feeble to look after yourself?

The answers we give to these simple questions show what frail human beings we really are. We cannot tell what will happen next in our own lives, so what shall we say about men who can foretell the destiny of a nation with absolute certainty? If their predictions all came true we would have no option but to admit that there was a power far greater than the human mind. In other words, such a person was speaking by the power of God.

THE EVIDENCE OF FULFILLED PROPHECY

Many events are foretold In the Bible and we can show that many prophecies have already been fulfilled and others are being fulfilled today. However **none of the Bible prophecies have been proved wrong.** Therefore we say that the evidence of fulfilled prophecy provides one very good reason for believing that the Bible is true - that it is the Word of God. A chart of the Old Testament prophets in their historical setting is shown on the facing page.

In this special issue of '*Light on a New World*' you will find examples of fulfilled prophecy such as the overthrow of Babylon, the destruction of Jerusalem and the return of the Jews to their ancient homeland as well as many other examples. This evidence serves to

confirm the reliability of the Bible and because of this we can equally rely on what it has foretold about the return of Jesus and the establishment of the Kingdom of God on the earth.

We find in the Bible the most confident assertions about the future; not just one, or even a few but many prophecies. There are prophecies concerning individuals, powerful nations and weak nations and even empires, some of which did not even exist at the time of the prophecy. There are both long-term and short-term prophecies; prophecies of things to come, the like of which had never happened before; of extraordinary experiences which nations would have, experiences without parallel and contrary to expectation.

GOD IS IN CONTROL

All this is found in the Bible. We discover that without exception none of the prophecies have been proved to be untrue. What are we to make of this? Could men predict the future in this way? Of course not, there can only be one conclusion; the men who wrote the Bible received direction from God himself, as one of the prophets wrote:

‘Remember the former things of old, for I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is none like me. Declaring the end from the beginning, and from ancient times things that are not yet done, saying, ‘My counsel shall stand, and I will do all my pleasure’ [Isaiah 46. 9,10].

Do not underestimate the force of Bible prophecy. The Apostle Peter in the chapter just quoted described it as the ‘*more sure word of prophecy*’ [2 Peter 1.19 KJV] and compared it to a light shining in a dark place. This is a very apt comparison. We look around the world and see confusion, with no apparent meaning or purpose to life. History seems just a haphazard sequence of events with no obvious aim, apart from the fleeting ambitions of the men who pass across the world’s stage.

However a study of the Bible demonstrates beyond all doubt that human affairs are under Divine control and are moving forward to a totally unexpected climax. The outcome will be a complete surprise to all but a few who understand what the prophet Daniel meant when he wrote: *'the Most High rules in the kingdom of men, and gives it to whomever he chooses'* [Daniel 4.32].

These words were addressed to Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon. He was no fairy-tale figure, but a powerful monarch in the ancient world. In recent times his capital city, Babylon, has been excavated and proved to have been in reality the immense city of which the Bible speaks.

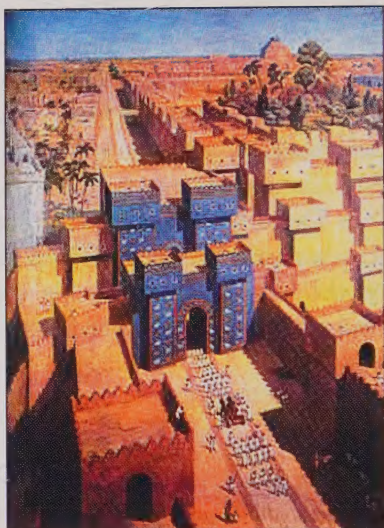


Artist's impression of the ancient city of Babylon

The hundreds of thousands of bricks that have been dug up all bear the name of the proud monarch who ruled the world of his day. Indeed, Nebuchadnezzar could claim to be the first monarch of the world. It was he who was told that *'the Most High rules in the kingdom of men'* but he was told far more than just that.

AN AMAZING DREAM

One night, as Nebuchadnezzar lay on his couch, the king wondered what would be the fate of his vast empire after he had passed from the scene. Such thoughts have probably occurred to all men in positions of great authority. *'On whom will my mantle fall? Will the mantle be torn in pieces by jealous rivals?'* Such questions normally go unanswered, for no man can tell what the future holds. However, Nebuchadnezzar was given the answer by God as we read in Daniel chapter two. Please read it through for it is one of the most remarkable chapters in the Bible.



The Ishtar gate in Babylon.

It tells us about a dream in which the answer that Nebuchadnezzar sought was given to him in symbolic form. It may be asked why Almighty God troubled to respond to the questioning of a pagan king; why he chose to do so by way of a dream and why this was in a form which the king could not understand, nor even remember on waking. The following observations may be made in answer and will serve to introduce the details of the prophecy and its fulfilment:

The importance of Nebuchadnezzar in the purpose of God lay not so much in the greatness of his empire, as in the fact that it included the land of Israel and that the people of Israel were taken as captives to Babylon for 70 years. God's land and God's people the Jews, were subject to Nebuchadnezzar's rule.

- The method used to give the information also brought Daniel to the forefront, a Jewish captive and the only man who could

explain the dream. This underlined the fact that the God '*who reveals secrets*' [Daniel 2.29] is the God especially of Israel – revealing a vital aspect of God's plan for the world (see article about Israel in prophecy page 37).

- The symbolic style adopted is a most effective way of conveying a great deal of information in a very compressed form. The modern political cartoon is an example of the same idea. However the cartoon only illuminates events of the past and present, whereas Nebuchadnezzar's vision shone a great beam of light on the future.

THE MEANING OF THE DREAM

In his dream the king saw what he himself would probably have described as a 'god'. It was the image of a man composed of various metals - **gold** head, **silver** breast and arms, **bronze** belly and thighs, **iron** legs, feet **part iron and part clay**. This metallic statue stood erect until some unseen power directed a stone at its feet. The image crashed to the earth, its remains were ground to powder and blown away by the wind and the stone that had inflicted the damage '*became a great mountain and filled the whole earth*' [Daniel 2.35].

What did all this mean? The clear words of the prophet Daniel placed the meaning beyond doubt. The image stood for the kingdoms of men in the ages that were to follow. The nations of the known world were at the time subject to the king of Babylon, who was represented by the golden head '*You are this head of gold*' [verse 38]. After this there was to follow a second '*silver*' empire, then a third and a fourth. The fourth kingdom was to be '*strong as iron*'. However, after the strength was to come weakness:

'Whereas you saw the feet and toes, partly of potter's clay and partly of iron, the kingdom shall be divided...as the toes of the feet were partly of iron

and partly of clay, so the kingdom shall be partly strong, and partly fragile...they will not adhere to one another, just as iron does not mix with clay'

[Daniel 2.41-43].

We can summarise the meaning of the dream as follows:

'You, O king... are this head of gold.'

Head of fine Gold = Nebuchadnezzar/Babylonian Empire.

'And after you shall arise another kingdom.'

Chest and arms of Silver = Medo-Persian Empire.

'Then another, a third kingdom of bronze.'

Belly and thighs of Bronze = Greek Empire.

'And the fourth kingdom shall be as strong as iron.'

Legs of Iron = Roman Empire.

'the feet were partly iron and partly clay...they will not adhere to one another.'

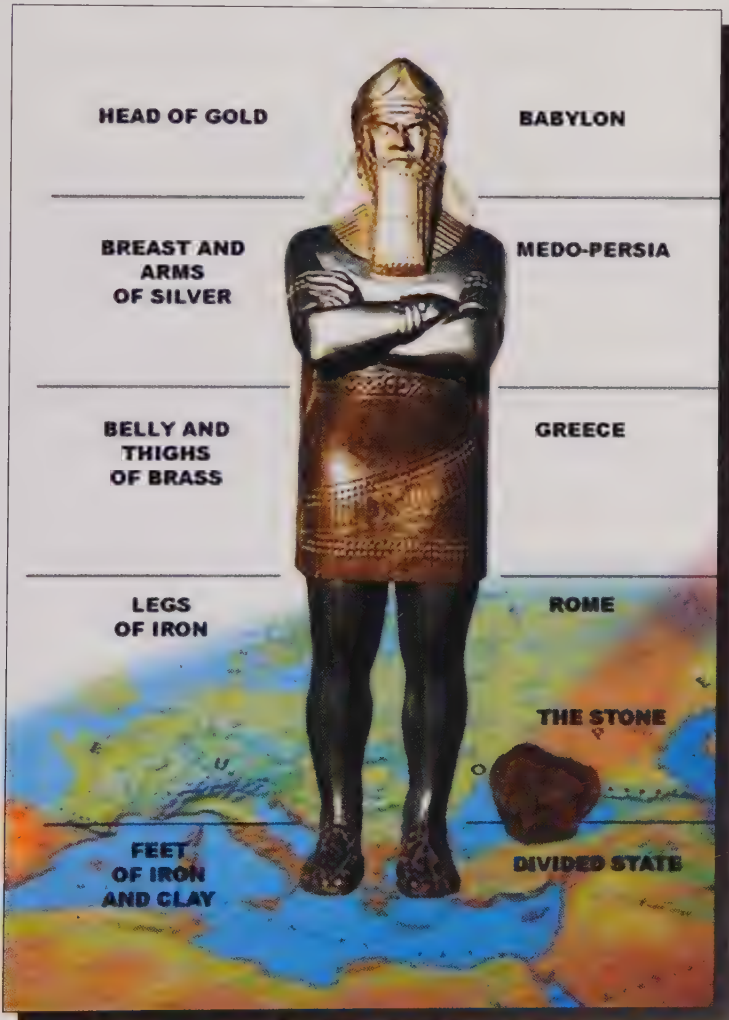
Feet of Iron and Clay = Divided state of the nations.

'And in the days of these kings the God of heaven will set up a kingdom which shall never be destroyed...it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms, and it shall stand for ever. Inasmuch as you saw that the stone was cut out of the mountain without hands...the great God has made known to the king what will come to pass after this' [Daniel 2.37-45].

Stone = Jesus Christ the king over the Kingdom of God.

The question that must now be answered is how do the facts of history compare with this prophecy? The correspondence is perfect, so

much so that some have tried to say that the second chapter of Daniel was written after the events that it describes! This is sufficient testimony to the accuracy of the prophecy but it is plainly a false idea, for the prophecy is still being fulfilled!



The meaning of Nebuchadnezzar's dream

AN OUTLINE OF WORLD HISTORY

Four great empires followed each other. Consult any history book covering the period and you will discover how Babylon fell to the Medes and Persians, an empire in which first the Medes and then the Persians were predominant. Their supremacy was ended by Alexander the Great who founded the Greek Empire. This in turn yielded to Rome which was unquestionably the strongest and most durable of the four world empires.

The world had never known anything to compare with the '*strong as iron*' Roman Empire. What power on earth could ever break it or conquer it? No single power could for as Daniel predicted Rome was not to be superseded. There was not to be another great empire in the line of Babylon, Medo-Persia, Greece and Rome. The strongest empire was destined to decay and disintegrate, a long drawn out process which has been traced in detail in Gibbon's monumental work entitled 'The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire.' Gibbon described the Roman Empire at its height in these words reminiscent of Daniel's prophecy: *'The arms of the republic...advanced with rapid steps to the Euphrates, the Danube, the Rhine, and the Ocean; and the images of gold, or silver, or brass, that might serve to represent the nations and their kings, were successively broken by the **iron** monarchy of Rome'* [Edward Gibbon, *The Decline and Fall of The Roman Empire*, Chandos Classics edition Volume 2 ch.38, page 576].

The decline of this great empire came about as decreed by Daniel's prophecy. Firstly the Empire was split into two parts - the Eastern Empire was ruled from Constantinople and the Western Empire was ruled from Rome. It will be remembered that the image had two iron legs. Later, both parts gave way to hostile forces from without and decaying processes within. Over the vast area once ruled by Rome a number of independent kingdoms emerged, some strong and some weak. This divided state of the nations has continued since that time. **There has been no fifth undisputed world empire in succession to the four represented by the image!**

Many attempts have been made to unite the nations of Europe by conquest but all have failed. Philip II of Spain, Napoleon I of France, Kaiser Wilhelm II and Hitler in Germany and others have tried but failed. Today we see the countries of the old Roman Empire in Europe trying to weld themselves together into a united whole. What a task it is proving! True were the prophet Daniel's words, *'They will not adhere to one another, just as iron does not mix with clay'*.

Who could have foreseen all this as long as two thousand six hundred years ago? Who could have asserted so confidently that there would be four empires, not three, or five, or six? Who, in a few bold strokes, could have delineated the outstanding features of their history and its sequel with uncanny accuracy? Could any man? From all that we know of human forecasts, the answer is **NO!**

We note that the prophet Daniel disclaimed all credit for his message: *'The great God has made known to the king what will come to pass after this. The dream is certain, and its interpretation is sure'* [Daniel 2.45]. Men and women who have since studied this prophecy have found here solid grounds for **confidence in God and His Word**. It is a confidence that you the reader can share.

PART OF THE PROPHECY STILL FUTURE

Moreover, the steady accurate fulfilment of Daniel's words leads us to look with renewed interest at the last stage of the prophecy. What shall we make of that little stone, which fell with shattering effect on the feet of the image, grinding it to powder, and then becoming a great mountain to fill the world? If the image represented the kingdom of men, the stone must stand for a power external to human rule, which is to establish itself as a world power upon the ruins of human governments. These it will *'break in pieces and consume'*. This is the explanation Daniel gave:

'And in the days of these kings, (i.e. the divided state of the nations) the God of Heaven will set up a

kingdom which shall never be destroyed; and the kingdom shall not be left to other people; it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms, and it shall stand for ever' [Daniel 2.44].

THE STONE

This is one of many promises in the Bible assuring us that God has not forsaken the earth. He has devised a plan - the Master Plan for human salvation - and the Lord Jesus Christ is the focal point of that plan. Thoughtful readers will readily be able to identify the stone '*cut out of the mountain without hands*' with the one who was born the saviour of mankind. He was '*cut out*' of the mountain of humanity, not by human hands, but by the power of God through the miracle of his birth. Jesus himself spoke of his future role as the stone in these words: '*The stone which the builders rejected has become the chief cornerstone. This was the LORD'S doing, And it is marvellous in our eyes...And whoever falls on this stone will be broken; but on whoever it falls, it will grind him to powder*' [Matthew 21. 42-44].

All the signs indicate that soon the stone will fall with devastating effect on an unsuspecting world. Will you be among those who escape the coming destruction? Will you share in the blessings of the age to come when the Kingdom of God is set up on earth? Jesus alone has the power to save.

We will now look at each of the empires in turn that followed the Babylonian head of gold. The next article focuses our attention on Iran the nation known as Persia in ancient times, which defeated Babylon. It was the second of those four great empires and was represented by the chest and arms of silver.



Iran in Prophecy

THE BIBLE GIVES a number of reasons why we should be interested in Iran. Firstly we find that it is mentioned under its classical name of Persia, as one of the four world empires described in Daniel chapter two. It is also referred to as one of the countries that will invade the land of Israel '*in the latter years*'. This reference is to be found in the prophecy of Ezekiel chapter 38.

The Bible also uses a major incident in the early history of that nation as a pattern to foretell another event of the '*latter years*', the way in which the Kingdom of God will be set up on the earth. This pattern is found by reference to the prophecy of Isaiah and the book of Revelation (see page 18 onwards).

The people of Iran are ethnically diverse from their southern and western neighbours. Though modern Iran is an Islamic country and they use Arabic script for their writing, they are not part of the Arab family of nations. The language of Iran (called Parsee) is reckoned among the Indo-European group of languages. The name Iran is akin to the word 'Aryan' which is further evidence that shows the Iranians to be drawn from European stock.

IRAN IN THE BIBLE

Today Iran, or to give it its full title, The Islamic Republic of Iran, is a country openly hostile to Israel (see article on page 37). Public pronouncements from officials of the government frequently call for the destruction of the 'Zionist entity'. Iran finances the 'Hisbollah' faction which has been fighting a bitter guerrilla war against Israel. The hostility shown by Iran towards the State of Israel has not always

been a feature of their relationship. Under the regime of the Shah, who ruled Iran until 1979, relations had been much more cordial.



Tehran, the capital of modern Iran

In 1960 Iran was one of the first countries in the Middle East to recognise the State of Israel. Iran became a trading partner and was at that time the major supplier of oil but things were destined to change.

After increasing unrest in the country which was met by an unsuccessful policy of repression, the Shah was at length forced to flee in January 1979. The leading Muslim cleric Ayatollah Khomeini, who had been living in exile returned home in triumph and presided over the establishment of an Islamic republic, but although Ayatollah Khomeini has passed off the scene, the attitudes he stood for are still in evidence.

Iran is a country that is rich in reserves of fossil fuels in the form of oil and natural gas. It has been a cause of concern therefore that the country in recent years has sought to develop a nuclear energy programme. For countries that have little in the way of fuel reserves

such a programme is understandable but for a country with an abundance of oil, to do so is suspicious. Nuclear power stations can be the means of producing materials to make nuclear weapons.

Russia has supplied the technology for the Iranian nuclear power programme and Pakistani nuclear scientists have passed further vital scientific information to Iran. The world's media is full of reports of Iran's nuclear ambitions, such as the Bushehr nuclear power station in the south of the country, the Natanz underground uranium enrichment project in central Iran and intelligence that their scientists are designing a heavy water plant at Arak which could produce weapons grade plutonium.



Satellite image of Bushehr Reactor

The danger of all this possible development of nuclear weapons by Iran is the threat posed to its neighbours and even further away. Iran is clearly committed to the destruction of Israel and is a state sponsor of terrorism.

EZEKIEL'S PROPHECY

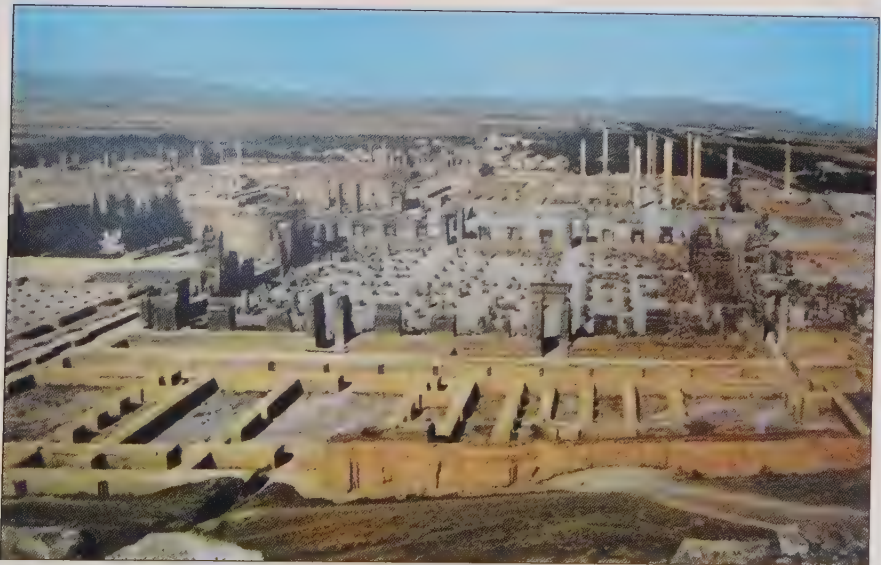
This is of particular interest to us today because it represents a situation envisaged by Bible prophecy. Ezekiel chapter 38 records a prophecy of a time which it calls '*the latter years*'. Bible students have for a very long time been interpreting this prophecy in terms of a strategic alliance which includes Iran (Persia). These will mount an attack against Israel in the final days before the Kingdom of God is set up on the earth. The prophecy, with some words of commentary in bold type, is as follows:

‘...Thus saith the Lord GOD: Behold, I am against you, O Gog, the prince of Rosh, Meshech, (**Muscovy**), and Tubal. (**Tobolski**): I will turn you around, put hooks into your jaws, and lead you out, with all your army, horses, and horsemen, all splendidly clothed, a great company with bucklers and shields, all of them handling swords. Persia, (**Iran**), Ethiopia, and Libya are with them, all of them with shield and helmet; Gomer (**France**) and all its troops; the house of Togarmah (**Central Europe**) from the far north, and all its troops - many people are with you...In the latter years (**towards the end of man’s rule on the earth**) you will come into the land of those brought back from the sword, and gathered from many people on the mountains of Israel, which had long been desolate; they were brought out of the nations, and now all of them dwell safely (**the re-gathered nation of Israel**) You will ascend, coming like a storm, covering the land like a cloud, you, and all your troops and many peoples with you’ [*Ezekiel 38.3-9*].

These events are the prelude, according to Ezekiel, of the time when God will intervene directly in the affairs of mankind [*Ezekiel 38.18-23*] (see also article on the coming world conflict page 45).

IRAN’S HISTORY AS A PATTERN

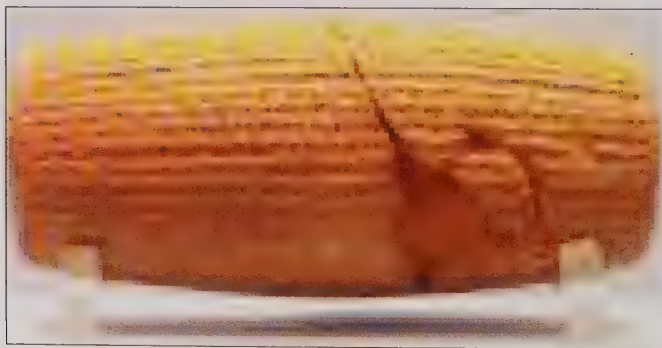
In the year BC 539 Iran or Persia as it was then known, first appeared on the world scene in a dramatic way. Under their first great king Cyrus and in alliance with their neighbours the Medes, they overthrew the empire city of Babylon and so fulfilled the second part of Nebuchadnezzar’s vision of empires. They executed the king of Babylon and set up their own empire that lasted for about two hundred years. Their empire was to hold sway over the civilised world until the uprising of the Greeks under Alexander the Great.



The ruins of Persepolis, Iran's ancient royal city.

Both Biblical and secular history record how the forces of Cyrus laid siege to the city. To the defenders of Babylon this seemed like a futile gesture. The city they thought, could withstand an indefinite siege. The city was well able to provide food and water for its people from within its extensive walls. The river Euphrates ran through the middle of Babylon, but this was to prove its downfall. Where the river ran through the walls, the area was defended by double 'gates' consisting of a grid-work of bronze that stretched across the whole expanse of the river. It was this very feature that was to prove the means of Babylon's downfall.

Unknown to the defenders of the city the forces of Cyrus were able to divert the flow of the river. They marched into the city along the dried up bed of the river Euphrates and through the great bronze gates that sympathisers in the city had opened for them. The city was taken completely by surprise. So sure of their defences had the rulers of Babylon been, that they had spent the evening in feasting and drinking as recorded in the book of Daniel chapter five.



Clay cylinder of Cyrus recording his conquest of Babylon.

These events of two and a half thousand years ago were foretold in detail by the prophets Isaiah and Jeremiah. They were of interest to the people of Israel at that time because they had a direct impact on

their lives. The essence of what Isaiah and Jeremiah prophesied about Cyrus and Babylon is set out in the table below:

Isaiah prophesied that:

- Israel would be taken captive into Babylon [*Isaiah 39.6,7*].
- Eventually Babylon's fall would come [*Isaiah 13.19; 21.9*].
- Babylon would be besieged by the Medes and Persians [*Isaiah 21.2*].
- Cyrus the Persian leader was called the Lord's '**Messiah**' (A Hebrew word meaning Anointed; in Greek the word is '**Christos**' or Christ) [*Isaiah 45.1*]...and the king from the East (or Sun's rising) [*Isaiah 41.2*]...who would take it by means of the dried up river bed [*Isaiah 45.1,2*].

Jeremiah prophesied that:

- Cyrus would allow the return of the Jews to their land and the temple would be rebuilt in Jerusalem [*compare Jeremiah 25.12,13 with 2 Chronicles 36.22,23*].

THE PATTERN OF HISTORY AS A PROPHECY

The fall of Babylon at the hands of Cyrus, this figurative '**Messiah**', is taken in other parts of the Bible as a pattern for the future work of Jesus Christ the Jewish '**Messiah**'. Jesus at his return will likewise decree the final return of the Jews to their land and the rebuilding of the temple in Jerusalem. This is the testimony of the prophets.

The book of Revelation chapters 16 to 18 uses this pattern of events to symbolise the things that are to happen when Jesus Christ

returns to the earth. Leaving aside the details of what these things might symbolise we can clearly see that many of those same features are there:

The drying up of the River Euphrates	<i>[Revelation 16.12].</i>
The unexpected coming	<i>[Revelation 16.15].</i>
The fall of Babylon the great	<i>[Revelation 16.19; 18.2].</i>
The kings from the East (the Sun's Rising)	<i>[Revelation 16.12].</i>

The lesson for us today is that the coming of Jesus to the earth in these latter days will be just as unexpected as the coming of Cyrus at the fall of ancient Babylon. The Bible tells about the confederacy of nations including Iran, which will attack and initially defeat Israel just prior to Christ's return. But as the prophet Ezekiel tells us, the confederacy will itself be defeated and destroyed through Divine intervention with the result that: *'...I (God) will be known in the eyes of many nations. Then they shall know that I am the LORD' [Ezekiel 38.23].*

The warning that Jesus gave to his disciples is even more urgent as the time approaches. Concerning that time he said:

'For it will come as a snare on all those who dwell on the face of the whole earth. Watch therefore, and pray always that you may be counted worthy to escape all these things that will come to pass, and to stand before the Son of Man' [Luke 21.35,36].

Having considered some prophecies, which have their fulfilment in the future, let us now review the historical events, which followed the fall of the Persian Empire.



Greece in Prophecy

THE THIRD EMPIRE portrayed in Nebuchadnezzar's image was the bronze armoured Greeks represented by the belly and thighs of bronze. The period of transition from the decline of the Medo-Persian Empire to the rise of the Grecian Empire began around 359 BC with the rule of Philip of Macedon, the father of Alexander the Great. Philip succeeded in uniting the warring Greek states and by 338 BC he had visions of the conquest of Persia.

ALEXANDER'S METEORIC RISE

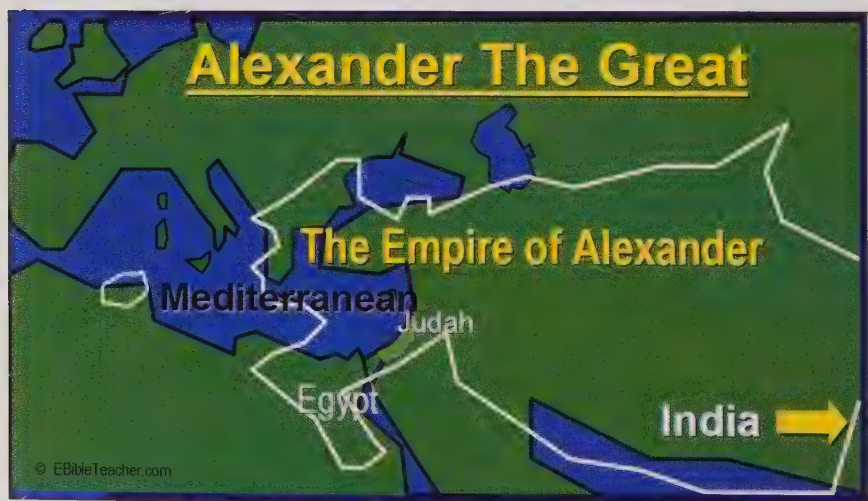
Alexander began to rule at the tender age of 20 when his father was assassinated. It was under Alexander that we really see the rise of this third 'bronze' empire. The brilliant and daring exploits of Alexander began when he took his armies across the Hellespont or Dardanelles as it is known today and defeated a much larger Persian army led by Darius III near Zelea on the River Granicus.



A mosaic found at Pompeii depicting the defeat of the Persian King Darius (centre of picture) by Alexander the Great (left of picture).

Daniel's prophecy refers to Alexander as this '*mighty king*' [Daniel 11.3]. He thrust across Asia Minor defeating the armies of Darius again in the Battle of Issus. There was now no stopping this ambitious warrior, for his armies next swept southwards into the Holy Land. There is no record that he entered Jerusalem; it seems he was more intent on taking strategic cities. He crushed Tyre the capital city of the Phoenicians, a vital seaport that gave him control over much of the Mediterranean.

Alexander then pushed south conquering Philistia and taking Gaza on the way to his real objective, Egypt. When he had subdued Egypt, he founded the city of Alexandria, a centre of Greek culture that made its mark on the biblical world in many ways.



Alexander then set out to take the rest of the Persian Empire. Marching his armies northwards he captured Syria, traversed the Fertile Crescent, entered Mesopotamia (now Iraq) seizing Babylon, then on eastward into Persia's heartland (now Iran) overcoming the major cities of Susa and Persepolis, with their enormous treasures.

Not satisfied with these conquests, Alexander then pushed further eastwards, occupying today's Afghanistan and Pakistan to the Indus

basin, with the Indian sub-continent now laying before him. But at this point, after a 14,000 mile route of conquest, his generals and soldiers were exhausted and threatened mutiny. Reluctantly he turned back, but now disaster set in. By the time he got back to Babylon he had only a quarter of the army left that he had set out with.

Alexander himself was taken ill with a fever in Babylon and within two weeks he was dead, a young man aged only 32. The history books give the exact day he died as June 13th in the year 323 BC. In the short space of twelve years, Alexander had established a Grecian Empire in complete control of the then known world. In all the lands he conquered he founded new cities, some named after him, and a system of rule and culture that transformed the world. It can be truly said that Alexander the Great appeared like a meteor in the political heavens and blazed his trail in history. But now that its charismatic leader had gone, what was to happen to this great empire?

THE PROPHECIES OF DANIEL

How telling are those words of the prophet Daniel, while explaining the meaning of the Image and the rise and fall of these Empires. He said to the king of Babylon: *'He (God) changes times and seasons; He removes kings and raises up kings'.* [Daniel 2.21]. We also see how striking the prophecies of Daniel are in describing the rise of Alexander and Greece to power and his subsequent demise.

'And as I was considering, suddenly a male goat came from the west, across the surface of the whole earth, without touching the ground; and the goat had a remarkable horn between his eyes...I saw him confronting the ram; (**Medo-Persia**) he was moved with rage against him, attacked the ram, and broke his two horns. There was no power in the ram to withstand him, but he cast him down...and trampled him; and there was no one that could deliver the ram from his hand. Therefore the male goat grew very great; but when he became strong, the large horn

was broken, and in place of it four notable ones came up towards the four winds of heaven...**the male goat is the kingdom of Greece.** The large horn that is between its eyes is the first king. **(Alexander).** As for the broken horn and the four that stood up in its place, four kingdoms shall arise out of that nation, but not with its power'

[Daniel 8.5-8,21,22].

This prophecy is colourful and specific, the vision of the powerful one-horned Grecian goat attacking the Persian ram, bounding along hardly touching the ground, is exactly right as a dramatic representation of Alexander's swift triumphant march from Macedonia to the borders of India.

THE DIVIDED GREEK EMPIRE

Daniel tells us in advance what was to happen to this Empire. In another prophecy he likens the Grecian Empire to a leopard, *'After this I looked, and there was another like a leopard, which had on its back four wings of a bird. The beast also had four heads, and dominion was given to it'* [Daniel 7.6].

These visions in chapters 7 and 8 of Daniel's prophecy foretold the sequence of events. Alexander had no heir and on his death his Macedonian generals scrambled among themselves to carve up the Empire between them. It split into four parts at first, represented by the four wings, the four heads and the four horns. With the death of Alexander the *'remarkable horn'* was broken and the four *'notable'* horns took its place, as Daniel foretold *'four kingdoms shall arise.. but not with its power'* [Daniel 8.22].

The generals Seleucus, Ptolemy, Lysimarchus and Cassander controlled the four major parts of the empire. Then after more conflict among these generals the empire split into two parts in the hands of Seleucus and Ptolemy, just as the sections of the Image demanded - the belly and **two thighs**. The first called the Seleucid kingdom ruled to the north of Israel from Macedonia to the borders of India. The second

called the Ptolemaic kingdom in the south took control of Syria, Cyprus, Palestine (now Israel), Libya and Egypt.

History shows that these two dynasties were then regularly at war with each other to gain control over Syria and Palestine. This meant that the Holy Land and Syria were the unfortunate battlegrounds for these two competing powers. These wars were also foreseen by the prophet Daniel. In chapter 11 he refers to *'the king of the South'* and the *'king of the North'* fighting with each other over God's land. In the past many Bible students have studied these prophetic words of Daniel, which cover a very long period of history. We believe that they take us from the time of Alexander's Greek Empire right up to the present time and beyond.

THE INFLUENCE OF GREECE

The effect of the Grecian conquests and occupation can be seen by the names of many of the cities of Israel. Accho a port on the Mediterranean coast was called Ptolemais and Beth-Shean at one stage had the Greek name Scythopolis. In the time of Jesus some of the places where he preached had retained their Greek names, as we find in the gospel records, names such as Perea, Trachonitis, and the Decapolis.

Even more influential was the fact that the Greek language was the dominant tongue in the time of Christ. The New Testament Scriptures were written in Greek, with many manuscripts surviving to the present day. Long before this, in 273 BC, the Old Testament Scriptures had been translated from Hebrew to Greek by order of Ptolemy II of Egypt, for his library in Alexandria, giving us the valuable Septuagint version.

The famous Rosetta Stone found in Egypt in AD 1799 and now kept in the British Museum, contains an inscription written in three languages to commemorate the reign of Ptolemy V (205-180 BC). The Greek language and Demotic script on the stone enabled the ancient Egyptian hieroglyphics to be interpreted and understood.

THE DECLINE OF THE GREEK EMPIRE

The division of the Greek Empire and its warring factions had its weakening effects. Palestine fell to the northern Seleucid kingdom in 200 BC and one of its kings, Antiochus IV Epiphanes, went too far in trying to force Greek culture on the Jewish people. In 168 BC he set up an altar to the Greek god Zeus in the temple in Jerusalem. This event was also foreseen by Daniel: *'they shall defile the sanctuary fortress; then they shall take away the daily sacrifices, and place there the abomination of desolation'* [Daniel 11.31]. This blasphemous act was too much for the Jews, sparking a revolt headed by the priestly family of Maccabees, leading eventually to a period of independence for Palestine.

But Rome, the fourth Empire of Daniel's Image, was now coming on the scene. The Maccabees in time, set up their own dynasty known as the Hasmoneans, even taking the title of kings. They cultivated good relations with Rome, removed the Greeks from power in Samaria and Galilee to the north and ruled most of The Holy Land. This continued until 63 BC when Pompey the Roman general occupied Palestine and Syria organising a Roman province in the former Seleucid dominions and giving power over most of Palestine to Herod the Great.

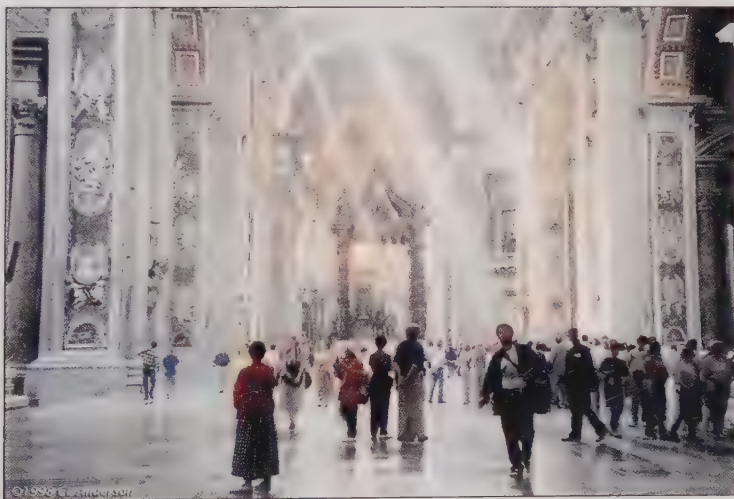
During the last century of Grecian Ptolemaic rule, Egypt came under Rome's protection and guidance, being finally annexed by Rome in 31 BC. The mixture of Roman and Egyptian politics at this time can be seen in the romantic affairs of Julius Caesar and Mark Anthony with Cleopatra. This situation ended in tragedy with Cleopatra committing suicide. She was the last sovereign of the Macedonian dynasty that had ruled Egypt from the death of Alexander.

This brings us to the end of the bronze empire of the Greeks and the rise of the Fourth Empire represented in Daniel's Image by the two legs of iron.



Rome in Prophecy

POPULARLY KNOWN AS the 'eternal city', Rome was home to the Caesars. Today the Pope, from inside Vatican City, presides over the universal Catholic Church. The city centre, which is only two miles across, is like an open museum. Tourists walking through the streets of the Forum are able to admire the many well-preserved buildings, once part of the nerve centre of the political and judicial life of ancient Rome. Close by stands the Coliseum, where Christians died rather than renounce their faith.



St Peter's Basilica in the Vatican City

ROME AND CHRISTIANITY

The beginnings of Christianity in Palestine are rooted in the wider Roman world. The circumstances of the birth of Jesus came about because *'In those days Caesar Augustus issued a decree that a census*

should be taken of the entire Roman world.' [Luke 2.1 NIV] Later Jesus stood trial before a Roman governor named Pontius Pilate.



By this time Rome was approaching the zenith of its imperial greatness. From small beginnings as a city-state in central Italy, its dominions came to include much of Northwest Europe including Britain and Spain, North Africa, Arabia and the Black Sea. Covering an area of over one and a quarter million square miles, the Empire ruled over one hundred million people. Historians know the period 30 BC to AD 180 as the 'Pax Romana' or 'Roman Peace'. As long as provinces stayed on peaceful terms with Rome, they were allowed self-government and to keep their own language and religion.

The rapid spread of Christianity owed much to the infrastructure of military roads and open borders maintained by the large standing army, which enabled freedom of travel throughout the Empire. With Latin and Greek widely used and a common legal administrative structure, the scope for preaching the Gospel was vast. But with time Christianity was corrupted by paganism to become itself a political force. The two chief cities of the Empire, Rome in the West and Constantinople (now now Istanbul) in the East, developed into the headquarters of the Roman Catholic and Greek Orthodox Churches respectively.

The decline and fall of the Roman Empire is well documented by the historian Gibbon in his book of that name. By AD 476 the city of Rome had been overthrown by Odoacer a Germanic warrior who became the first barbarian king of Italy (AD 476-493). The Holy Roman Empire eventually replaced the rule of the barbarians in the West. In this dual system involving secular and ecclesiastical powers working together, the Roman Catholic Church effectively ruled Europe for more than one thousand years. One historian described the rule of the Pope in these words:

‘In many ways, indeed, the Church was comparable to the Roman Empire of old, whose territorial and administrative organisation it had taken over, and whose official language, Latin, it still maintained in its services, records and literature. Both were international in character. Everyone recognised the Pope as everyone had worshipped the Emperor ... At the head and centre of it all, watching over the whole world, interfering in everything, exercising temporal as well as spiritual power sat Innocent III, with an authority quite comparable with that of a Trajan or a Diocletian.’ [*Thorndyke, Mediaeval Europe, page 14*]

The Pope may have lost his temporal power in AD 1870, but his spiritual powers are as great now as when the Papacy held sway over Europe in the Middle Ages. Today Rome is still at the centre of Christendom through the authority of the Roman Catholic Church which has around one billion members worldwide.

THE CHALLENGE OF PROPHECY

The complex history of Rome stretches over two thousand years or more and involves many lands and peoples. This was a period of great political and religious change and no man could have forecast these

developments. Prophecy is important for establishing the authority of the Bible and the ability of God to control human history, as we read in the prophecy of Daniel:

‘Blessed be the name of God for ever and ever, For wisdom and might are his. And he changes the times and the seasons; he removes kings and raises up kings; he gives wisdom to the wise and knowledge to those who have understanding. He reveals deep and secret things...’ [Daniel 2.20-22].

The book of Daniel contains many very specific prophecies some of which have been referred to in previous articles. In the context of Rome the visions of the great image in chapter two (see page 6 onwards) and the four beasts in chapter seven are important. They give an outline of the sweep of world history.

Nebuchadnezzar’s image had two legs of iron which answer to the two divisions of the Empire in the East and the West, established by Diocletian in AD 287. The Eastern Empire finally came to an end in AD 1453, when the Turks captured Constantinople. The chief characteristic of this section of world history as defined in the image, was to be the iron strength of Rome.

‘...the fourth kingdom shall be as strong as iron, inasmuch as iron breaks in pieces and shatters all things; and like iron that crushes, that kingdom will break in pieces and crush all the others.’

[Daniel 2.40]

Daniel chapter seven also tells us about a vision of four beasts seen by the prophet which is very closely linked with Nebuchadnezzar’s image. (see chart in November/December 2001 issue page 4)

THE FOURTH BEAST

Daniel's vision of the four beasts also highlights the iron strength of the fourth beast. The prophet wanted to know its meaning, for it was *'different from all the others, exceedingly dreadful, with its teeth of iron and its nails of bronze, which devoured, broke in pieces, and trampled the residue with its feet'* [Daniel 7.19]. The explanation was given to Daniel:



'...The fourth beast shall be a fourth kingdom on earth, which shall be different from all other kingdoms, and shall devour the whole earth, trample it and break it in pieces' [Daniel 7.23].

With ruthless efficiency the Roman legions marched under the banner of the eagle to conquer and put down rebellion. The Jews were warned early in their history of the curses that would befall them if they disobeyed God:

'The LORD will bring a nation against you from far away, from the ends of the earth, like an eagle swooping down, a nation whose language you will not understand, a fierce-looking nation without respect for the old or pity for the young...They will lay siege to all the cities throughout your land until the high fortified walls in which you trust fall down...' [Deuteronomy 28.49-52 NIV].

This prophecy was fulfilled when the Roman armies under Titus crushed a Jewish rebellion. After a horrific siege, Jerusalem, including

Herod's temple was destroyed in AD 70 (see picture page 39). Jesus also foretold this event and the subsequent dispersion of the Jews throughout the world. This is part of the Mount Olivet prophecy found in the Gospel record of Luke:

‘But when you see Jerusalem surrounded by armies, then know that its desolation is near... For these are the days of vengeance, that all things which are written may be fulfilled... And they will fall by the edge of the sword, and be led away captive into all nations. And Jerusalem will be trampled by Gentiles until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled’

[Luke 21.20-24].

NO FIFTH WORLD EMPIRE

A feature of the visions in the book of Daniel is that they do not go on to describe a world empire to take over from Rome. The Arabs and Turks came close, whilst the ambitions of men like Napoleon, Hitler and others were thwarted.

The final phase of Nebuchadnezzar's image - the feet and toes part iron and part clay suggests a collection of smaller kingdoms, some weak and others strong.

‘Whereas you saw the feet and toes, partly of potter's clay and partly of iron, the kingdom shall be divided...And as the toes of the feet were partly of iron and partly of clay, so the kingdom shall be partly strong and partly fragile...but they will not adhere to one to another, just as iron does not mix with clay.’ *[Daniel 2.41-43]*

When we read about the fourth beast in Daniel chapter seven, we note that it had ten horns instead of ten toes. In the vision Daniel saw another little horn come to prominence.

‘...in this horn, were eyes like the eyes of a man, and a mouth speaking pompous words... the same horn was making war against the saints, and prevailing against them... The ten horns are ten kings who shall arise from this kingdom. And another shall rise after them...different from the first ones...he shall speak pompous words against the Most High, shall persecute the saints of the most High, and shall intend to change times and law’ [Daniel 7. 8,21,24,25].

The point to note here is that Daniel was prophesying about the Roman Empire some five hundred years before its rise to power. By the time Jesus Christ was born in Palestine, the land was under Rome’s domination and ruled by a puppet king, Herod the Great. This Roman Empire was greatly involved in the events surrounding the life, death and resurrection of Jesus and the spread of Christianity.

It should be no surprise that Jesus himself should leave us in no doubt about the future of this Empire. The last book of the Bible is titled ‘The Revelation of Jesus Christ’ and when we look at this book we see that there are sections that have striking similarities to the prophecies of Daniel. After the time of Christ, the Roman Empire was first ‘Christianised’ and then broke up into strong and weak independent nations represented by the iron and clay feet and toes of Daniel’s image – but these nations, as history shows, have long been held together by the influence of the Roman Catholic Church.

ROME IN THE BOOK OF REVELATION

The last book of the Bible is concerned with events to take place after the Révelation was communicated to the Apostle John around the end of the first century AD [Revelation 1.1]. The key to its interpretation lies in a careful comparison of the symbology of the book with similar symbols found in other parts of the Scriptures. Like

Daniel's vision of the fourth beast, the book of Revelation describes the continuing importance of Rome in the unfolding of God's plan. Its role is depicted by four beasts, three of which have ten horns like Daniel's fourth beast. All four beasts are seen persecuting the saints, or the true Christians.

The visions of Daniel and Revelation consistently define the persecuting role of the Roman Catholic Church that developed out of the Roman Empire. History bears witness to the brutality of the methods used for stamping out opposition to the power of the Papacy.

BLASPHEMER AGAINST GOD

The Apostle Paul foresaw a development that would take place before the Second Coming of the Lord Jesus Christ.

'Don't let anyone deceive you in any way, for that day will not come, until the rebellion occurs and the man of lawlessness is revealed, the man doomed to destruction. He will oppose and exalt himself over everything that is called God or is worshipped, so that he sets himself up in God's temple, proclaiming himself to be God'

[2 Thessalonians 2. 3,4 NIV].

The blasphemous words spoken against God by Daniel's fourth beast also feature in Revelation. For example the *'beast rising up out of the sea'* had *'...on his heads a blasphemous name...And he was given a mouth speaking great things and blasphemies'* [Revelation 13.1,5].

The *'woman sitting on a scarlet coloured beast'* was *'full of names of blasphemy'* [Revelation 17.3]. Note the significant point of identification with Rome: *'The woman whom you saw is that great city which reigns over the kings of the earth'* [Revelation 17.18].

- **The Great Red Dragon = Pagan Roman Empire**
'...he persecuted the woman who gave birth to the male child' [Revelation 12.13].
- **Beast of the Sea = Western Roman Empire = Papal Power**
'...it was granted to him to make war with the saints and to overcome them. And he was given authority over every tribe, tongue, and nation' [Revelation 13. 7].
- **Beast of the Earth = Holy Roman Empire**
'...He was granted power...and cause as many as would not worship the image of the beast to be killed.'
[Revelation 13.15]
- **Scarlet Coloured Beast with woman seated = Roman Catholic Church**
'...And I saw the woman, drunk with the blood of the saints and...of the martyrs of Jesus.' [Revelation 17. 6]

THE FUTURE OF ROME

All the prophecies we have briefly considered have a time limit set on them to bring to an end all human rule. When the stone strikes the feet of iron and clay, the metallic image is standing erect on its two legs, the symbols of the Eastern and Western divisions of the old Roman Empire – now the nations of Western Europe. A similar limit is set on the war waged by the little horn of Daniel's fourth beast:

'...the court shall be seated, and they shall take away his dominion, to consume and destroy it for ever. Then the kingdom and dominion, and the greatness of the kingdoms under the whole heaven, shall be given to the people, the saints of the Most High. His kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and all dominions shall serve and obey him' [Dan 7. 26,27].

In the symbology of Revelation the scarlet coloured beast gathers support for the final confrontation:

‘And the ten horns which you saw are ten kings’ who have received no kingdom as yet, but they receive authority for one hour as kings with the beast...These will make war with the Lamb, and the Lamb will overcome them: for he is Lord of lords, and King of kings...’ [Revelation 17.12,14].

Rome, the ‘*great city*’, is also described in Revelation as ‘*Babylon the great.*’ [Revelation 18.2]. It is not difficult to see the connection with Babylon of old, the head of the image, whose overthrow was foretold by Jeremiah (see Jeremiah chapters 50 and 51). In the same way the final destruction of Rome ‘*that great city, which reigneth over the kings of the earth*’ is graphically described in the symbology of Revelation: ‘*Then a mighty angel took up a stone like a great millstone and threw it into the sea, saying, “Thus with violence the great city Babylon shall be thrown down, and shall not be found any more”*’ [Revelation 18.21].

The countries of the enlarged European community are being drawn closer together both politically and economically, structured on the Treaty of Rome and influenced by their spiritual head, the Pope. The tentacles of this new political system extend from Brussels in all directions, affecting many aspects of the lives of its citizens.

History is repeating itself for this is what happened when Charlemagne became the first Holy Roman Emperor. His administration was noted for constant interference in the lives of his subjects and we see it happening again. Rome has yet to play its part in the events which are to lead to the overthrow of all human government and the establishment of the Kingdom of God.



Israel in Prophecy



Satellite image of Israel

THIS ARTICLE DRAWS attention to Bible prophecies about the nation of Israel. It should be remembered that Israel is the most important nation in the Bible. The Lord Jesus who was a Jew by his mother Mary, said '*salvation is of the Jews.*' [John 4.22] Other than the Lord Jesus, most of the outstanding Bible characters such as Abraham, the father of the faithful and king David, the man after God's own heart, were also Jews. Israel is the nation through whom God chose to reveal His plan of salvation for the human race.

THE ORIGIN OF ISRAEL

In view of Israel's importance in the Bible, it is not surprising that there are many prophecies about the Jews. Israel's national history was marked out in advance, in a way no other nation can begin to rival. Abraham was of course the progenitor of the Jewish race [Genesis 12.2]. Because of his faith, promises were made to Abraham which indicated that he would father a nation through whom all nations would be blessed [Galatians 3.8]. He was told that his descendants would grow in

number and flourish despite being enslaved for many years in Egypt. Afterwards they would escape and possess the land of Canaan. (an old name for Palestine or Israel - see Genesis 15.13-21) This period of their history is known as the Exodus.

THE EXODUS

After the exodus from Egypt, God chose the children of Israel as His special people [*Exodus 19.1-8*]. Not only were they given a uniquely moral and just set of laws and a system of religious worship, but also through their leader Moses, more prophecies were given about their future. Israel were offered great incentives for obedience to God and the threat of dire punishment for disobedience (See Leviticus chapter 26; Deuteronomy chapters 28 and 31.24-29).

In fulfilment of such prophecies, the whole history of the nation of Israel is a story of blessing and cursing - of high points and extreme low points, depending on whether they obeyed or disobeyed their Divine calling. During their wanderings in the wilderness, prior to occupying the land of Canaan, the great majority perished due to their lack of faith. On the other hand, it was those wanderings that produced a new generation, including men like Joshua who obeyed the voice of God and showed great discipline and faith in the face of their enemies during the conquest of the land of Canaan.

THE KINGDOM OF ISRAEL

The period of the Judges followed and then Israel became a kingdom, just as Moses had predicted [*Deuteronomy 17.14-20*]. David was a man of great faith and he was the ancestor of a line of kings through whom it was prophesied that the Messiah would come. (Messiah (Hebrew) = Christ (Greek) and means anointed; see 2 Samuel 7.12-16; Psalm 89.34-37).

Eventually the kingdom became so corrupt that it was brought to an end as predicted by the Divinely inspired prophets of Israel. After the death of King Solomon, the kingdom divided into two parts – the

northern kingdom of Israel with its capital in Samaria and the southern kingdom of Judah with its capital in Jerusalem. The northern kingdom was attacked by the Assyrians and the Jews were taken into captivity in 722 BC. The southern kingdom of Judah lasted a little longer and the Babylonians took them as captives to Babylon for seventy years. When they returned (see the books of Ezra and Nehemiah) the Jews remained subject to oppressive conquerors i.e. the Persians, Greeks and Romans right up to and including the time of Christ.

A NATION SCATTERED

But it was Israel's rejection of Christ (their Messiah or anointed king) that finally brought about the scattering of the nation and the destruction of Jerusalem and its splendid temple by the Romans. Christ himself predicted this in his well-known Mount Olivet prophecy found in three of the Gospel accounts [*Matthew 24.1,2; Mark 13.1,2; Luke 21.5-7, 20-24*]. However, in the last of these accounts, Christ also predicted that one day the Jews would again recover control of Jerusalem, a development which only took place as recently as 1967, so this prophecy about Jerusalem took around 1900 years to be fulfilled! [*Luke 21.24*].



Details from the arch of Titus in Rome depicting the fall of Jerusalem in AD 70

However, the prophets of Israel had long before these events, predicted the scattering and subsequent re-gathering of Israel [*Isaiah* 8.6-22; 52.1-10; *Jeremiah* 31.4-14; *Ezekiel* 37.1-14]. Even long before this, the prophetic words of God through Moses, in *Leviticus* chapter 26 and *Deuteronomy* chapter 28 had predicted the many sufferings and persecutions that Israel afterwards endured in the periods of exile from their land.

Despite being persecuted like no other nations since the time of the Romans (including six million Jews killed by the Nazis during the Second World War), the nation of Israel has survived because they are God's chosen people and for the sake of the covenant made with their fathers Abraham, Isaac and Jacob [*Jeremiah* 30.10,11; *Romans* 11.25-29].

A NATION REGATHERED

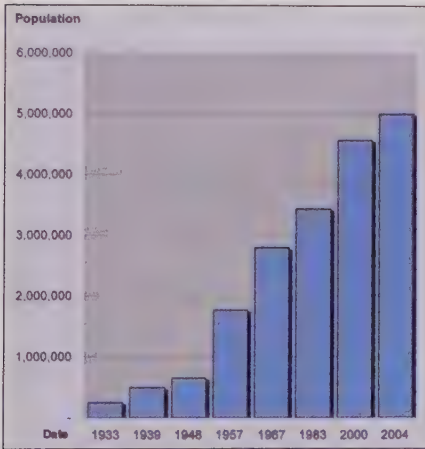
By 1850, Palestine had for many centuries been ruled over by the Turkish Ottoman Empire and had become a desolate wilderness for the most part. The Turks were certainly not in favour of any mass immigration of Jews back to Palestine, even if it could be made to sustain the many millions of Jews scattered across the globe.

The majority of Jews were in Europe and North America and they enjoyed a level of prosperity that was hardly likely to motivate them to leave their homes and businesses for the hardships of the deserts of Judaea or the malarial swamps of Galilee. Yet the Bible's prophecies demanded that Israel **must** return to their land.

Because of the anti-Semitism he witnessed, Theodor Herzl, an Austrian Jew wrote a book in the 1890's calling for the creation of a Jewish State in Palestine. The idea was taken up by prominent Jews and the World Zionist Organisation was created resulting in small numbers of Jews returning to the land. In 1917, during the First World War, the British armies drove the Turks out of Palestine. As part of the peace settlement, the British government was given the Mandate over

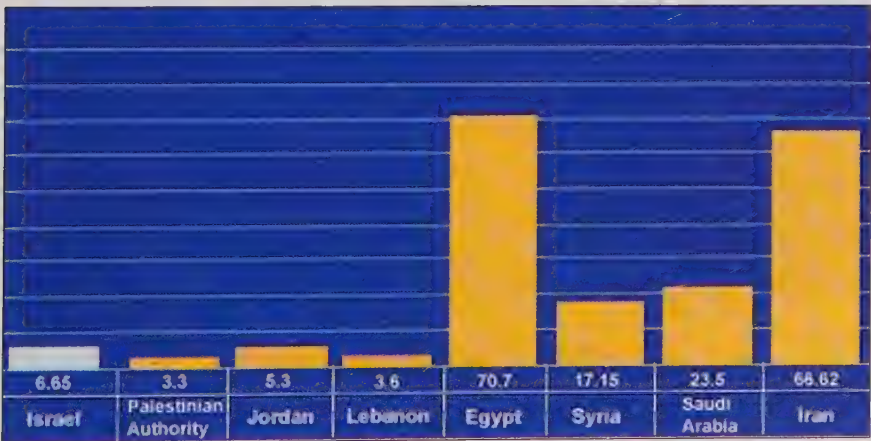
Palestine and stated that they 'viewed with favour the establishment in Palestine of a national home for the Jewish people'.

Subsequent British governments failed to fulfil this promise in the face of fierce Arab opposition, and eventually on 15th May 1948, gave up the Mandate to the United Nations. The Jews in Palestine, now



Growth of Jewish population of Israel

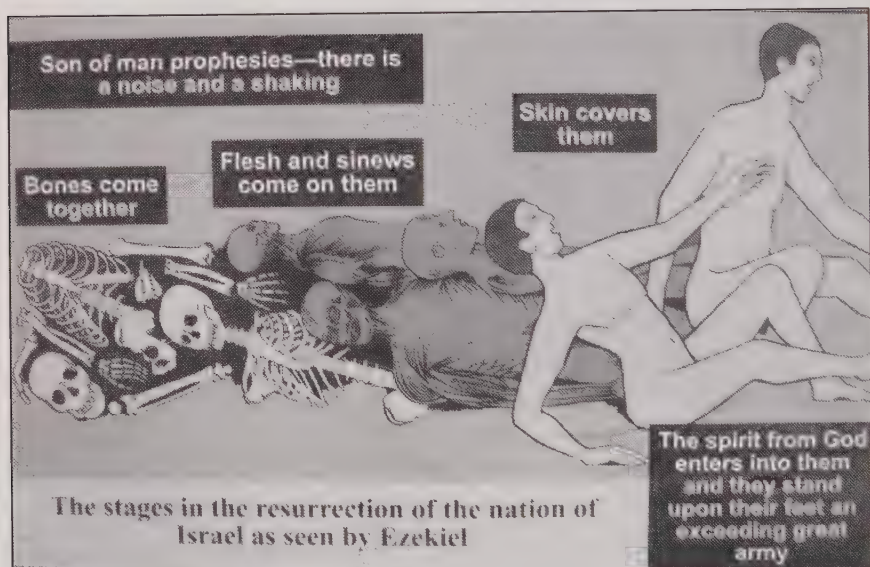
numbering around 600,000, declared themselves an independent state that was recognized by the United Nations Organisation. Despite being attacked by the armies of the surrounding Arab nations, the newly-formed State of Israel miraculously survived and immediately opened its doors to the persecuted refugees of Europe and to Jews from all over the world. The Jewish population of Israel has grown to around five million by 2004.



Population of Israel compared with its Arab neighbours

ISRAEL TODAY

So it was that, despite being driven from their homeland, persecuted like no other nation and separated from their land for many centuries, the Jews retained their identity. Israel has not only survived but has also revived and become established as a nation state. All this must demonstrate the hand of God at work to fulfil the many prophecies in His Word about the restoration of His people.



The prophet Ezekiel was shown a valley full of dry bones in vision and told: *'these bones are the whole house of Israel.'* But the word of God through Ezekiel predicted a national resurrection:

'Thus says the Lord GOD: Behold, O my people, I will open your graves, and cause you to come up from your graves, and bring you into the land of Israel...Surely I will take the children of Israel from among the nations, wherever they have gone, and will gather them on every side and bring them into their own land' [Ezekiel 37.11,12,21].

For the second time in their long history **the Jews have returned to their land**, in fulfillment of the words of their ancient prophets. The Scriptures reveal that the most important event is yet to happen – **they will return to their God**. Very few Jews living in Israel today believe in Jesus Christ as their Messiah, although central to Judaism is the belief that the Messiah is yet to come. A return to their God must involve acceptance of Jesus Christ, the heir to David's throne in Jerusalem [Luke 1.26-33]. Many prophecies about Israel foretell the future restoration of their kingdom (see for example Psalm 2; Psalm 72; Isaiah 9.1-7; 11.1-12; Micah chapter 4; Zechariah chapter 12).



The city of Jerusalem today

THE FUTURE FOR ISRAEL

How then is Israel to be brought to accept Christ as their Messiah? Again, prophecy provides the answer (see Ezekiel chapters 38 and 39; Daniel 11.40-45; Joel chapter 3; Zechariah chapter 14). These passages combine to give a picture of a devastating future attack on Israel, which Scripture describes as '*the time of Jacob's trouble*' [Jeremiah 30.7]. This conflict will follow a period of peace and prosperity [Ezekiel 38.10-13], and will shatter their State and leave them with only part of the city of Jerusalem under their control, but in a state of siege [Zechariah 14.1,2].

It is at this time of crisis, when Israel seems to face certain destruction, that Divine intervention will take place. Jesus Christ, the promised Messiah will come and vanquish the enemies of Israel and claim back their allegiance to Him. What better opportunity could there be to win Israel over to Christ other than for him to effect the complete overthrow of Israel's latter day enemies and persecutors?

They will then recognize Christ as their Messiah as foretold by the prophet Zechariah: '*...they will look on me whom they have pierced; they will mourn for him as one mourns for his only son...*' [Zechariah 12.10].

Then the promised Kingdom of God on earth will become a reality and with it, the consequent outflow of blessings for all nations as promised to Abraham [Genesis 12.2,3. Galatians 3.8]. This is the hope of every true Christian and this is what Jesus meant when he said '*salvation is of the Jews*' [John 4.22]. How this will come about is the subject of the next article.



The coming World conflict

THIS REVIEW OF Bible prophecy has mainly concentrated on **fulfilled prophecy** and for a very good reason. Prophecy, set out clearly in the Bible and seen to be fulfilled by the comparison of Scripture with secular history, provides grounds for belief that the Bible is the Word of God. We have looked at a number of examples, which demonstrate God's overall plan with the nations of the world. We have also considered His special purpose with the nation of Israel.

The establishment of the Kingdom of God upon earth lies at the centre of the Divine plan and is the subject of extensive Bible prophecy. It requires the return of Jesus Christ to fulfil all the promises of God. Jesus himself foretold the events that would precede his return to earth.

In what has become known as the Mount Olivet prophecy, Jesus first warned of the overthrow of the Jewish State. In fulfilment of prophecy, the Romans ruled over the land of Palestine at the time of Jesus and the Jews were a subject people. Jesus prophesied that the Romans would soon execute the plan of God and disperse God's chosen people throughout the world:

'And they will fall by the edge of the sword, and be led away captive into all nations. And Jerusalem will be 'trampled by Gentiles until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled' [Luke 21. 24,25].

The disciples of Jesus had asked him about the signs of his Second Coming. Jesus set out very clearly the signs which would prevail and which would lead up to his return in **'power and great glory'**.

'And there will be signs in the **sun**, in the **moon**, and in the **stars**; and on the earth distress of nations, with **perplexity**, the sea and the waves roaring; men's hearts failing them from fear and the expectation of those things which are coming on the earth, for the powers of **heaven** will be shaken. Then they will see the Son of man coming in a cloud with **power and great glory**' [Luke 21.25-27].

The return of the Jews to their own land and the restoration of Israel as a home for the Jewish people in 1948 is a fulfilment of prophecy already considered in the previous article. In the decades that have followed there have indeed been signs among those symbols of the ruling powers of the nations, in the **'heaven'** and in **'the sun, moon and stars'**. There **is** much **'perplexity'** as to how the problems of the world can be solved by human government. Wars, terrorism and violence continue particularly in the area known as the Middle East and there seems to be no solution to these problems. Jesus said that this would be another sign of his impending return.

The prophets of Israel foretold the events affecting Israel and all nations, just prior to the coming of Christ. Consider the following example which we mentioned in an earlier article (see article on Iran page 16). In the prophecy of Ezekiel we are given the description of a group of nations showing a hostile attitude to the restored nation of Israel. This is how the group of nations are described:

'Son of man, set your face against Gog, of the land of Magog, the prince of Rosh, Meshech, and Tubal, and prophecy against him, and say, 'Thus says the Lord GOD' [Ezekiel 38. 2,3].

Careful reading of this chapter leaves us in no doubt that this group of nations - including Persia (Iran) Ethiopia and Libya - are to be compelled by God to attack the land of Israel: *'...In the **latter years** you will come into the land of those brought back from the sword and gathered from many people on the mountains of Israel, which had long been desolate; they were brought out of the nations...'*[Ezekiel 38.8].

This federation of nations is centred upon a power which is situated to the north of the Holy Land and it is interesting to note that Israel, both in the past and even at the present time, has needed to look carefully to the security of her **northern** borders. The Syrians of course are a threat from that direction, just as the Assyrians were some 2,500 years ago.

God, speaking through the prophet Ezekiel concerning this **northern** aggressor said: *'Then you will come from your place out of the far **north**, you and many peoples with you...You will come up against my people Israel like a cloud, to cover the land. It will be **in the latter days**...'*[Ezekiel 38.15,16].

The identity of this federation, to be gathered against Israel in the very near future is not difficult to assess. Magog, Meshech and Tubal are acknowledged by students of ancient history to be the descendants of one of the sons of Noah, namely Japheth (see map on page 48).

Persia (now Iran), Ethiopia and Libya are nations antagonistic to Israel. These are well known to us today, and the prophet Ezekiel, speaking with Divine authority, tells us they will be joined by the descendants of Japheth, the *'**latter day**'* occupiers of the *'**far north**'*.

Directly to the north of Israel as mentioned above, is Syria, one of Israel's many Arab enemies. Further north through Armenia we come to the troubled, now largely independent states of the former USSR. We note with interest the high Islamic following that there is among this group of nations.



Now it would be foolish for students of prophecy to dogmatise on the outcome of unfulfilled Bible prophecy. God alone has the right to determine the outcome of His plan for the world - a plan remember, which will be realised in the establishment of the Kingdom of God and the commencement of the Millennium, or thousand year reign of Christ upon earth. If we are true students of God's word, then we are also watchmen. Christ's warning to his followers was that they should **watch!**

‘Watch therefore, for you do not know at what hour your Lord is coming. But know this, that if the master of the house had known at what hour the thief would come, he would have watched and not allowed his house to be broken into. Therefore you also be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour when you do not expect him’

[Matthew 24.42-44].

As we survey the world scene, now we have moved into the 21st century, what do we see? We see Israel, returned to their land in fulfilment of such prophecies as Ezekiel chapter 37. We see hostility towards Israel on every border, except perhaps, towards the south

where the peace treaty with Egypt holds good at the time of writing. The Arab (Islamic) nations are truly confederate against God's people and have tried to destroy them more than once. *'They have said, "Come, and let us cut them off from being a nation. That the name of Israel may be remembered no more"' [Psalm 83.4].*

A study of Psalm 83 will enlighten the earnest student of Biblical prophecy concerning the identity of the nations mentioned in this intriguing Psalm. They are the ancient enemies of Israel and they find a territorial identity with the current enemies of God's people.

The northern aggressor of Ezekiel chapter 38, in association with the clearly identified nations, who currently have no time for the Jews who occupy *'the land brought back from the sword'*, are those whom **God** will bring in a final conflict against Jerusalem: *'For I will gather all the nations to battle against Jerusalem' [Zechariah 14.2].* Another of God's prophet's adds *'...in those days and at that time, when I bring back the captives of Judah and Jerusalem, I will also gather all nations, and bring them down to the Valley of Jehoshaphat...'[Joel 3.1,2].* We are left in no doubt that this is the day when God will intervene directly in human affairs once again and cause His will to be done on earth:

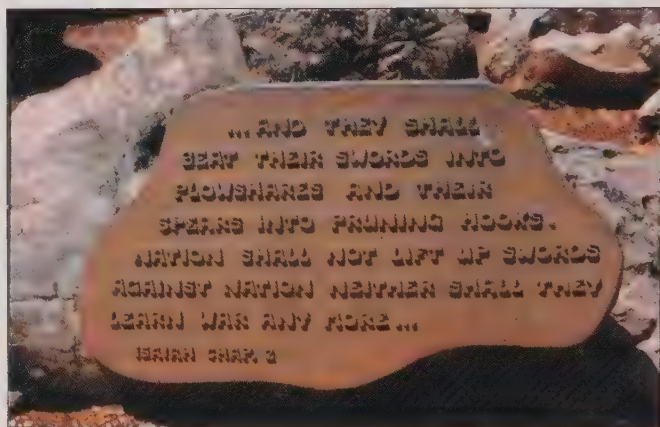
*'Multitudes, multitudes in the valley of decision!
For the day of the LORD is near'... 'The LORD also
will roar from Zion, and utter his voice from
Jerusalem; The heavens and earth will shake; But
the LORD will be a shelter for his people, and the
strength of the children of Israel. So you shall know
that I am the LORD your God, dwelling in Zion my
holy mountain. Then shall Jerusalem be holy, and
no aliens shall ever pass through her again'*

[Joel 3.14,16,17].

We are convinced that we are living *'at the time of the end'*

described by the prophet Daniel (*Daniel 11.40 – 12.2*). This is the time that will witness the return of Christ, the future ruler of the earth. These prophecies, and particularly those of Joel and Zechariah together with the great prophecies of Isaiah and Ezekiel, present to us **God's plan for the world.**

Isaiah has been referred to as the prophet of the Kingdom. We commend to the attention of our readers the prophetic words of Isaiah which give us a graphic word picture of the age to come (*Isaiah 2. 2-4*). *It is not without significance that part of this passage appears on a sign on Israel's northern border!*



As watchmen, we should seek to analyse every step forward in this plan. For every step forward brings ever closer that day of final conflict, known also in the Bible as **Armageddon** [*Revelation 16.16*], when in the words of Zechariah:

‘...the LORD shall be King over all the earth. In that day it shall be - The LORD is one, and his name one’ [*Zechariah 14. 9*].

Time for mankind is fast running out - will you be ready for Christ's return?

What About Your Future?

WHEN WE LOOK at history it is usually in an abstract way because we are not involved in the events that took place; but Biblical history is different. It is presented as material evidence in support of the claim that its prophecies were given by the power of God for we read *'holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit' [2 Peter 1.21]*.

This should lead us, not merely to hold these ancient prophecies in high esteem but to recognise that the Bible is Divinely inspired, for it contains the record of God's plan as dictated to His servants the prophets. The purpose of the recorded Scripture is not for us to look back at what might have been, but to recognise from the past that life is the result of a carefully planned purpose in which the Creator's aim is quite clear, *'For the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the LORD, as the waters cover the sea' [Habakkuk 2.14]*.

It will be recalled that the prophecy connected with the vision of the image shown to the King of Babylon in Daniel chapter two still remains partly unfulfilled - the final part relates to the establishment of the Kingdom of God on earth when Jesus returns.

God has a purpose with His people that will be fulfilled in the setting up of the restored kingdom of Israel. Jesus is destined to be king ruling over the whole world from Jerusalem. We are therefore able to **look forward** with hope to the future, because we have the evidence of fulfilled prophecy on which to base our confidence. It can only be a hope though, to those who believe it, for as we read in the letter to the Hebrews: *'...for he who comes to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of those who diligently seek him' [Hebrews 11.6]*.

The purpose of the Scriptures is to enable individuals to participate, through God's mercy, in His future plans. This is the essence of *'the gospel of the Kingdom of God'* preached by Jesus [Mark 1.14]. This

hope of the Gospel was held by men of faith like Abraham, for the Apostle Paul wrote: *'God...preached the gospel to Abraham beforehand saying, "In you all the nations shall be blessed"'* [Galatians 3. 8].

The faith of this man and others is spoken of in the letter to the Hebrews chapter 11. Read the chapter carefully, for it tells us that true faith is an essential characteristic of all those who will have a part in God's plan for the future. We are told that *'all these (men and women of faith), having obtained a good testimony through faith did not receive the promise, **God having provided something better for us, that they should not be made perfect apart from us**'* [Hebrews 11.39,40]. Do you want to participate in **'something better'**? Can you accept the certainty of God's promises, based on the fulfilment of prophecy to date?

To those who heed *'the more sure word of prophecy'* [2 Peter 1.19 KJV], the wise man Solomon, after carefully considering life with all its aims, challenges and achievements, had this to say: *'Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the whole duty of man'* [Ecclesiastes 12.13]. One of these commandments requires a person to be baptised having fully believed the Gospel of the Kingdom of God.

In Acts chapter 10 we read about a Roman centurion called Cornelius, who was *'a devout man, and one that feared God,'* but, as The Apostle Peter told him, this in itself was not enough. After he had satisfied himself that Cornelius fully understood and believed the way of salvation through Jesus Christ, Peter baptised him.

What about your future? Are you going to be like those who didn't believe that the prophet's words would come true until it was too late? Or will you be among those like Cornelius and look forward to the fulfilment of *'all that the prophets have spoken'* [Luke 24.25], the end of the kingdoms of men as predicted by Daniel and the establishment of the Kingdom of God on earth?

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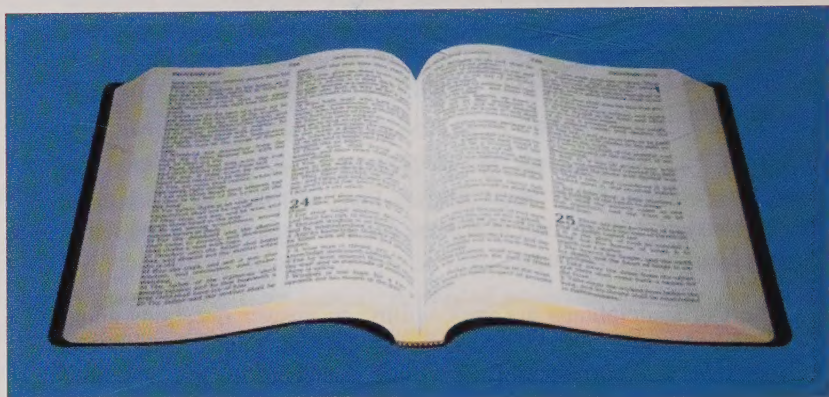
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